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ARTICLES:

(1) Questions and answers from interview with Kevin Maher,
Security Division Director at the US Embassy in Japan:
Strengthening Guam base would improve Japan's deterrence
capabilities

The following are the questions and answers from Sankei's interview with Kevin Maher, director of the security division of the US Embassy in Japan.

-- The talks on the realignment of US forces in Japan are reaching the final stage.

"All of the realignment proposals make up a package that we would like to see the Japanese government implement in order to improve the capabilities of the US-Japan alliance. We, too, think that the burden of the bases should be lightened, and this is Japan's chance to do so. The Japanese government is carrying out coordination with local governments, but we recognize that there is need to listen to the voices of the local communities in implementing the plans."

-- Are you thinking of responding to calls for revision of the (coastal plan) for relocating Futenma Air Station to Camp Schwab?

"Specifically, we need to make technical adjustments. The basic plan agreed on (coastal plan) should be implemented, but in order to do so, we need to listen to the voices of the local communities, and if there are small technical adjustments needed, we will respond flexibly."

-- There is a request from the local community for you to move the relocation spot toward the ocean (okiai ni surashite hoshii).

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"(The relocation) would not be possible unless we can provide assurance to the people in the local area by taking into consideration the safety and noise factors. There is flexibility in making adjustments based on that perspective."

-- By moving the Okinawa Marines to Guam, won't deterrence capabilities drop?

"Although the most important purpose of moving the Marines to Guam is to lighten the burden of Okinawa, another part of realignment is to be in a location where they can respond flexibly to a crisis. Even if the command is shifted to Guam, the combat troops and functions of Futenma air field would remain on Okinawa, and the deterrence capabilities would not be degraded."

-- What level of the shared cost of relocating the Marines to Guam are you asking Japan to bear?

"That is something the Japanese government and the Japanese people will decide. If Japan cooperates, the relocation of the Marines will be swift, and the facilities on Guam will be improved. It will also be possible for the Self-Defense Forces to increase their drills on Guam, which will be a plus for Japan. I would like to stress that the strengthening of the functions of the Guam base will lead to improved deterrence capabilities for Japan."

-- How is the perception of China as a threat reflected in these moves?

"The need to improve the capability of the alliance is not thought of as a response to any one specific country. The changes are to respond to new threats and diverse situations. Rather than focusing on a threat, we should improve our relations as countries that are being called to play important roles globally."
"

-- The Japanese government is having difficulty coordinating with the local governments, so do you feel frustration?

"None in particular. The Japanese government I believe can implement the plans."

(2) Strains in the Japan-US alliance (Part 1): How will two countries break away from dependence on Koizumi-Bush friendship?

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)
March 5, 2006

On Feb. 18, talks were held at a US military facility in Tokyo's Minamiazabu district between senior Japanese and US officials to discuss the realignment of US forces in Japan. In the discussions, US Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless repeatedly stressed sharply, "Futenma is our top priority. Without that problem solved, 8,000 Marines will not move."

Lawless was making it clear that the transfer of 8,000 US Marines out of Okinawa is strictly conditioned on the relocation of the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station.

Although Tokyo and Washington agreed 10 years ago to relocate Futenma Air Station to a new site in Okinawa, the Japanese government has yet to convince affected local governments to

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accept a relocation plan within the prefecture. Although Japan and the US are in accord in principle on the need to alleviate the burden on Okinawa, they are wide apart when it comes to specifics.

Japan and the US also disagree on the reform of the United Nations. Japan, Germany, India, and, Brazil jointly produced a plan to expand the 15-member UN Security Council by 10 seats. But the US refused to support the plan. As a result, Japan changed its position and independently came up with another plan to increase the membership only by six in a bid to win the endorsement of the US, which wants to keep the framework relatively small. But the US has yet to express its support for even that plan. Some Japanese officials have begun speculating that the US is just trying to buy time in order to shelve UN reform.

There is a reason for Japanese officials to feel uneasy.

Prior to the Japan-US summit meeting last November, Japanese and US officials actually had agreed to add six seats to the UNSC. But the summit meeting failed to nail down the plan, as Prime Minister Koizumi forgot to broach it in his talks with President Bush. Reportedly this prompted the US to become even more reluctant to back Japan's reform plan, concluding that Koizumi himself was unenthusiastic about reforming the world body.

To begin with, Japan-US relations now rely heavily on the personal relationship between Koizumi and Bush. Their mutual trust was solidified by Japan's deployment of Ground Self-Defense Force troops to Iraq.

Koizumi once confided to an aide, "Even if Japanese troops were attacked by terrorists and faced tremendous difficulty, I would not pull them out of Iraq." The US highly evaluated Koizumi's unprecedented resolve to take risks.

The President's power in the United States seems almost absolute. Thus, Koizumi, being recognized as a friend of the US President, has been able to use that relationship as Japan's trump card in dealing with the US.

But the GSDF mission in Iraq, a symbol of how well the Japan-US alliance is going, is expected to come to an end shortly. Prime Minister Koizumi is also scheduled to step down from his post in September.

Will Tokyo and Washington be able to break away from their reliance on the personal friendship of the two leaders and rebuild strong institutional relations?

One of the answers to that question would be enhancing foreign-policy cooperation between Japan and the US centering on Asia.

The two countries need to tighten the noose around North Korea's nuclear ambitions by keeping the "dialogue and pressure" approach in place. China's rapid growth also requires long-term strategies by Japan and the US.

The security front also needs closer bilateral cooperation. The two countries produced an interim report last October specifying a variety of objectives, such as missile defense, intelligence sharing between the SDF and US military, and greater interoperability.

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Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga noted, "Japan must select and address areas on its own before being pressed to do so by the US military."

Koizumi is considering making his last visit to the US as prime minister. If realized, his visit is certain to become a major event to forecast the future of the Japan-US alliance under the Koizumi administration.

Japan-US relations, reputed to be the best in the postwar era, are now at a crossroads. The two countries have begun locking horns over US force realignment, beef trade, UN reform, and other issues. Where will the Japan-US alliance head for, once the Koizumi-Bush honeymoon relationship is over?

(3) Tasks to clear before removing ban on US beef imports:
Interview with Tetsuo Jinbou, freelance journalist; Argument
"beef will be safe under blanket-testing system" is fictitious

ASAHI (Page 15) (Slightly abridged)
March 3, 2006

The government has re-imposed its ban on US beef imports, following the discovery of vertebral columns, a specified risk material (SRM), in a shipment to Japan. Japan has criticized the US for violating the agreement reached between the two countries. But the agreement itself, in a sense, is unreasonable. The government assumes the responsibility for this development, because it has not satisfactorily provided the people with information to enable them to make a proper assessment of the situation.

When the first case of BSE was announced in Japan in September 2001, the government was slow to disclose the information, resulting in heightening public distrust in beef. To eliminate the uneasiness, the government explained: "If a blanket inspection system is introduced, the safety of beef will be ensured." This misguided explanation complicated matters even further.

Many might think that if a blanket-inspection system is introduced, all products to be shipped to market would be tested. But even under this system, only those parts of the brain in which agents causing BSE tend to be accumulated are tested. Of course, this can be taken as a part of the safety net, but the risk of BSE still will not be completely removed.

To prevent BSE, it is important to impose restrictions on animal feed and to remove SRMs. Following the discovery of the first case of BSE in the nation, Japanese cattle farmers began to take these measures, and by 2003 or so, the measures were fixed across the nation.

Despite this fact, the government continued to take advantage of the "myth of blanket testing." The media also stopped shy of reporting that blanket testing is not a perfect safety measure. As a result, many Japanese still believe that "beef will be safe under the blanket-inspection system."

In the US, satisfactory restrictions have not been imposed on animal feed. SRMs have not been completely removed, either. That is the reason why concerns about the safety of US beef remain.

The US allows livestock farmers to use meat-and-bone meal from cows as animal feed. It is difficult to confirm cross contamination, namely, that cattle never eat feed intended for pigs or chicken. Feeding cattle chicken manure is also allowed. Given these circumstances, the risk of indirect contamination cannot be ruled out.

In Japan, SRMs are required to be removed from all cattle. In the US, though, the requirement is to remove SRMs only from cattle 30 months of age or older. It has also been reported that the SRM-removal process is considerably sloppy at leading meat-processing plants in the US. There are loopholes in feed restrictions, and SRMs have not been satisfactorily removed. The rate of cows subjected to BSE testing to all cattle in the US is only 1%. Under such circumstances, it is conceivable that the US has not come up with an accurate BSE incident rate.

In Europe, SRMs must be removed from cattle 12 months of age or older. Compared with this, the US standards are overly lenient, but in contrast, Japan's standards are too strict for even the international community.

Even so, I cannot totally agree with the view that "Americans eat beef without any anxiety about its safety and that Japanese people are overly nervous." In the US, 13 states have introduced a so-called food libel laws (TN see URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_libel_laws). In part because of this, ordinary American people cannot easily obtain information about BSE.

Experts see the possibility of humans being infected with BSE as considerably low, based on the view that the species barrier would prevent BSE from infecting humans. They say it would be unreasonable to fuel general public distrust in beef.

The Japanese government, even so, must set two key requirements -- feed restrictions and SRM removal -- as the absolute conditions for resuming US beef imports. The government then should disclose information and provide the public with the opportunity of deciding on whether to eat US beef. To do so, it is also necessary to impose the labeling requirement of origin on processed products, in addition to raw meat now subject to the application of the requirement under the current JAS Law.

(4) Tasks to clear before removing ban on US beef imports:
Interview with NCBA Chairman Michael John; US ready to take sufficient safety measures, including inspectors' retraining

ASAHI (Page 15) (Full)
March 3, 2006

I have been greatly disappointed at our loss of the Japanese market again following the discovery of a violation of the agreement reached between the US and Japan last December. I hear that the vertebral columns in question were shipped in response to an order from a Japanese company, but the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for export procedures in the US. Japan is an important trading partner for US beef producers, and we would like to maintain good relations with Japan in the future, as well. We are determined to address the BSE issue in the form of cooperating with Japan, instead of taking an adversarial position.

The recent violation, however, has nothing to do with the issue of food safety but is from start to finish simply a technical problem. The responsible inspector made a mistake. In dealing with a special case (of veal from a calf several months of age, which is considered free from BSE risk in the US), the inspector reportedly was not fully trained.

In the report on research results released by USDA on Feb. 17, Secretary Johanns presented measures to prevent a recurrence of a

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similar violation, specifically, including retraining inspectors and increasing the number of personnel engaged in inspections. Although I cannot speak from the standpoint of Japanese consumers, I believe those measures will be sufficient to restore their trust in the safety of US beef. We will also offer cooperation so that the measures in the report will be actually implemented.

The longer Japan puts off a response to the report, the more heated arguments (calling for Japan's early resumption of US beef imports) will be heard in the US Congress. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) will hold a spring general convention in Washington and pay calls on the Congress in late March. I think American producers are willing to do whatever they can to help Japan resume US beef imports. There are congressmen who support the principle of free trade and are calling for actions to maintain fair trade relations.

We would like to avoid a situation in which Japanese consumers would become distrustful of US beef in the belief that Japan decided to resume imports under political pressure from the US. We have promised, though, to observe the Japan-US agreement, and in actuality, there is no problem in terms of safety. If the US takes measures to prevent a similar case, I believe there will be no reason for Japan to keep a permanent ban on US beef.

I hear some Japanese are skeptical of the United States' system for estimating the age in months of cattle, but there is the requirement for us to prove that beef bound for Japan is from cattle 20 months of age or younger by either means - USDA inspection of meat quality at slaughterhouses or birth records. The conditions that producers must abide by are clearly set forth in US export procedures. I do not think there is any problem with the US age-determination system.

In addition, US slaughterhouses have long taken the measure to remove specified risk materials (SRM). Meat-processing plants have been inspected more strictly than any other food plants in the US and even in the world.

Since the first case of BSE was reported in the US in December 2003, we have inspected more than 630,000 head of cattle at high risk of BSE, but only one tested positive. We have also banned SRM from being used as animal feed for more than eight years, in response to a request by the World Organization for Animal Health, known as the OIE.

I have been a rancher who raised cattle, so cooked beef has been a daily essential on our family's dinner table. I guess the same is true for most families in the US. American consumers' trust in the safety of beef remains unchanged. We will carry out whatever we can to convince Japanese consumers of the safety of US beef. I am looking forward to seeing Japanese consumers enjoy the taste

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of US beef again.

(5) Self-destruction of Minshuto (Party 3 - conclusion): Restart of stricken Minshuto

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)
March 4, 2006

Kozo Watanabe, 73, the new chairman of the main opposition party Minshuto's (Democratic Party of Japan) Diet Affairs Committee, made former Diet affairs chief Yoshihiko Noda, 48, laugh on March 3 by saying, "Actress Mitsuko Mori can still to hand stands despite her being 85 years old. We both eat three raw eggs every day."

At a meeting of all Diet members of the party, Watanabe urged the participants to get moving with more vigor during the second half

of the ongoing Diet session or else, "We won't be able to respond to the public's expectations.

The largest opposition party appeared to have has momentum at the opening stage of the current Diet session having obtained a set of four issues to grill the government and ruling coalition. The four issues include: the Livedoor scandal; the anti-earthquake data falsification scam; the issue of US beef imports; and the bid-rigging scandal involving the Defense Facilities Administration Agency. Lower House member Sumio Mabuchi, who pursued the government on the earthquake-proof data falsification scandal, expressed enthusiasm on his own website that since the Diet is the only place for the opposition to display its presence, he would carry out heated debate at the session.

Minshuto, however, made a fatal mistake in dealing with the e-mail fiasco, lodging allegations made by one of the party's lawmakers based on a fabricated email message. As a result, the party's pursuit of the set of four issues foundered. Last weekend when lawmaker Hisayasu Nagata, who had brought up the e-mail allegations in the Diet, was hospitalized, Mabuchi grumbled to the party's Budget Committee members: "We don't need to change our stance of pursuing the government and ruling camp. We should not just be thinking about pursuing scandals."

Based on the self-examination that the party lacked investigative and verification capabilities, giving priority to Diet performances, the party held on March 2 a first meeting of its investigative team on the e-mail uproar. The panel began looking into measures to prevent a recurrence. Some mid-level and junior lawmakers have called for reconsidering how the party should basically deal with matters as an opposition party.

The opposition usually grills the stance of the government-ruling coalition and their responses at the budget committees of both chambers where the ruling and opposition camps conduct debate on national issues in general. After that, they deliberate individual bills, presenting counterproposals to play up the capability of assuming the political reins.

Minshuto conceives such Diet debate as realizing a functioning two-party system.

However, the Yomiuri Shimbun has learned from an ad-hoc public opinion survey conducted on March 1-2 that 72% of the respondents thought that Minshuto did not have the capability of assuming the

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reins of government. Despite the fact that the party's survival is at stake, many veteran and mid-level lawmakers have been quietly watching from afar the maneuvering at the top on choosing the new chairman of the party's Diet Affairs Committee. The maneuvering is aimed at the party leadership race in September. Such moves in Minshuto may explain the public's dissatisfaction with the main opposition party.

President Maehara said on March 3:

"I want to rebuild the leadership. I also would like our party to fulfill the responsibility of the largest opposition party by pursuing the set of four issues and distortions of the Koizumi reform drive."

Watanabe categorically said this about his party's Diet strategy:

"We don't have to stick to just stating the policy line. If we consider that a bill benefits the public, we will approve it. But if we assume that a bill will not be good for the people, we might boycott debate on it."

In an attempt to stand up against the huge ruling coalition, it is absolutely necessary for Minshuto to secure public confidence. Whether it can do so is an open question.

(Corrected copy) Self-destruction of Minshuto (Part 2): President Maehara manages the party as if he is still in college

On the night of February 28 when Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Noda was forced to step down from his post to take responsibility for the e-mail fiasco, seven members, including Mitsuo Mitani and Keiro Kitagami, got together at a Tokyo restaurant. The seven were elected for the first time to the Diet in last year's House of Representatives election. They were all concerned about the future of their party.

One lawmaker said:

"The current executive is a party of good friends or a group of persons who have similar characteristics. They have no one who can work behind-the-scenes. I wonder if the party can survive as is."

Some junior lawmakers supporting Maehara even began to question the party leadership, which is now exposed as incompetent, witnessing party leaders' slapdash handling of the e-mail issue.

Maehara has managed the party along with his close friends, including Yoshihiko Noda, who resigned as chairman of the Diet Affairs Committee, Acting Secretary General Koichiro Genba, and Goshi Hosono, his junior in Kyoto University. Maehara, Noda and Genba are graduates of the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management. A lawmaker affiliated with the now defunct Democratic Socialist Party commented: "(Maehara) conducts politics just like college students carrying out activities."

Maehara, who aims to fulfill strong leadership, tried to reach internal consensus on such basic policies as security and

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constitutional amendment through his top-down management. For example, without getting approval of the party, he stated in a speech last December that China was a threat to Japan. He then tried to make his view the party's.

Maehara's political methods are similar to those of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who got postal privatization bills through the Diet, refusing harmony and cooperation with anti-postal reform forces in the LDP. Since Maehara has often left Secretary General Hatoyama out of the loop, some party members

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dub him the "mini Koizumi." By calling anti-Koizumi lawmakers as the forces of resistance, Koizumi won public support. One of the reasons why Maehara cannot unify the party is that he does not have a strategy, something that politicians who have managed to clear a number of obstacles usually have developed.

Minshuto's local organizations and support groups of its lawmakers are weak. Although Minshuto is regarded as a party that might form a two-party system with the LDP, the main opposition party has only 35 local government assembly members, which means that it is difficult for the party to observe views of voters and local governments, lacking a sense of balance to give consideration to a variety of views in the party.

Hiroshi Yamada, the head of Suginami Ward, dined with Maehara, Noda and Genba on Feb. 7. Yamada, the three lawmakers' senior of the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management, gave them advice, saying, "You have to widen personal network as politicians. I'm worried about your political activities. You must have intelligent agents to establish information networks."

Maehara, however, only replied, "You can say that again."

The e-mail fiasco came about ten days later. Taking the information obtained by lawmaker Hisayasu Nagata on faith, a few members in the party executive decided to take it up at the Diet -- a decision that led the party to self-destruction.

Bunmei Ibuki, a former labor minister, said in a meeting of his faction on March 2:

"Senior lawmakers elected to the Diet a number of times have a political sense of balance and guardedness. But Minshuto has excluded such thinking in its management."

Ibuki's analysis is that this structural problem in Minshuto led to the e-mail uproar.

Yesterday the executive was finally able to pick former Lower House Vice Speaker Kozo Watanabe as chairman of its Diet Affairs Committee. The appointment of Watanabe is probably their afterthought to downplaying of "behind-the-scenes maneuvering" in the party. Maehara's term as president will expire in September. Minshuto members have to work hard against time to unite.

SCHIEFFER